

Health and well-being of migrant children in Ireland: the role of social capital ¹⁴⁷⁷



Michal Molcho, Colette Kelly, Saoirse Nic Gabhainn
Health Promotion Research Centre
National University of Ireland Galway



Background

In 2006, an estimated 3.5 million people settled as new residents in Europe, with the largest increase in immigration evident in Spain and Ireland. The Irish 2006 census revealed that 15% of the population was foreign nationals (6% of the child population), an all-time high.

The national profile of immigrants in Ireland reveals that about half of the non-Irish Nationals are from the UK and the rest are from countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa, yet, little is known of the experiences of child immigrants in Ireland. This study aims to address this gap in knowledge.

Objectives

To investigate the health, well-being and social capital of immigrant children in Ireland.

Underlying values and principles

Immigrant children are a group that is more prone to health inequity and social exclusion. This study was driven by the need to identify inequalities and inequities in the health of this potentially marginalised group in the population and explore underlying mechanisms that may explain these inequities.

Knowledge base and evidence base

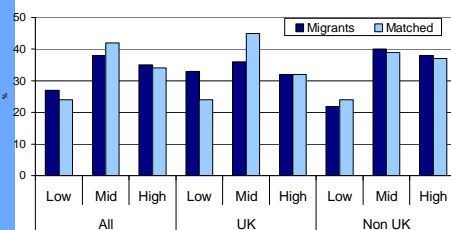
Little research has been conducted on immigrant children outside of North America, and the research that has been conducted has focused on mental health, engagement in risk behavior and school attainment and

achievements. No clear cross-cutting patterns have been identified among child immigrants from different counties of origin or across different host countries. Previous studies have focused on national policies as explanations for the level of integration but have not addressed the potential role that social capital plays in integration of immigrant children. This study investigates the moderating effect of social capital in understanding deficits in well-being among child immigrants.

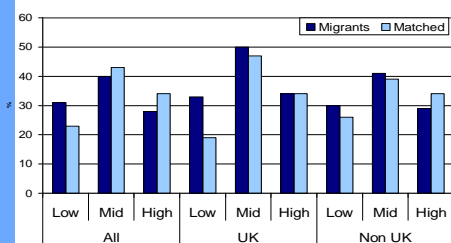
Methods

A nationally representative sample of 10,146 schoolchildren aged 10-17 years old schoolchildren completed a questionnaire during class time. Questions included the country of birth (of participants and their parents), measures of family affluence, school perceptions, perceptions of local area, self-rated health, life satisfaction and self-reported happiness. Perceptions were summed up and divided into three levels: low, middle and high.

General school perception



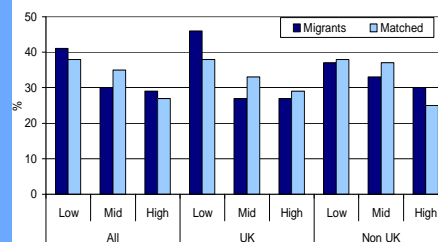
Perception of student relationships



Context

This study is based on data collected as part of the Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study. The data set comprises a random sample of schools across Ireland. This specific analysis was conducted on a sub-sample of 562 immigrant children and an equal sample of 'native' children that were matched by age, gender, social class and location.

Perception of local area



Conclusion

Overall, immigrant children were more likely to live in less affluent households, report lower life satisfaction, have a more negative perception of their local area and experience social exclusion compared to their 'native' peers. Data were broken down to explore differences between UK immigrant children (the largest immigrant group in Ireland) and non-UK immigrants compared to their native peers. No differences were evident in relation to self-reported health. Although reporting positive school / local area perceptions was strongly associated with improved well-being, it did not reduce the deficit between immigrant and 'native' children. This study suggests that being an immigrant is in itself a predictor of poorer health and well-being.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the young people who have participated in this research, their parents and schools; HBSC Ireland is funded by the Office of the Minister and Youth Affairs and the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health and Children, Government of Ireland. We acknowledge the support of the International HBSC network, and the International Co-ordinator Professor Candace Currie.

References

Molcho, M., Kelly, C., & Nic Gabhainn, S. (2010). Deficits in health and wellbeing among immigrant children in Ireland: the explanatory role of social capital. *Translocation: Migration and Social Change*, 6(4).

